



**GILEAD
COMMUNITY SERVICES, INC.**

"Improving Lives, Building Futures"

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Testimony to Public Health Committee, Friday, March 8, 2013

HB 5992- AN ACT CONCERNING THE TREATMENT OF PERSONS WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES.

Jim Probolus, Past President Board of Directors, Gilead Community Services, Inc.

Good afternoon Chairs Gerratana, Johnson, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Jim Probolus. I have lived in Portland Ct for over 35 years and currently serve on the Board of Directors of Gilead Community Services. This agency, based in Middletown, provides high quality health and human services to almost 600 children and adults and employs over 250 people. Gilead is a non-profit agency providing a full range of programs and services to those in our community and their families who suffer from mental illness. Nonprofits as you may know serve over half a million people, and employs approximately 11% of CT's workforce.

I am appearing before you to ask that you consider the full impact of this act and to further elaborate on its impact by expanding on the language to not only require, "...to allow certain health care providers to obtain medical records for the treatment of patients in facilities for persons with psychiatric disabilities and to allow persons involved in formulating the patient's discharge plan to communicate with the patient's family members concerning the plan, subject to the provisions of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).", but to specify that there be programs put in place to educate the public as to the importance that early detection of mental health issues and disease has in the successful treatment of these afflictions. We have recently seen how irresponsible statements made by uninformed and callous individuals can distort and stigmatize those who have to deal with mental illness. Calling a person suffering from mental illness a "monster" does little to help our society deal with mental illness and its impact on the lives and families who deal with this on a daily basis. These inflammatory statements made to deflect blame and attention from themselves and their agendas place additional stress and pressure on both those who suffer with mental illness and

those seeking to help in their recovery to lead productive and meaningful independent lives, without having the stigma of being mental ill. We don't demonize someone with cancer or heart disease, why is it that we see those with a mental "illness" as less worthy of our support and understanding?

Mental Health Treatment involves the practice of good medical disciplines just as any branch of physical "medicine" does. We have made great strides in having the insurance industry provide coverage for "behavioral" health. It is time to educate the public and each other of the need and value for quality mental health treatment. Proper case management and highly trained and dedicated staff can do wonders to hasten recovery. However time and materials as well as money are needed in order to educate the public that the proper treatment for those with mental illness is key.

I want to thank everyone for recognizing the importance of the Safety net and the need to modernize but, as we use more resources for administrative burden and increased costs of doing business, there are less direct services delivered to our clients. The state can help by assuming part of the burden by providing the public services needed to educate the public of the need to treat mental illness as a disease, as worthy as any physical disease, such as cancer, heart disease or diabetes, of funding and resources to treat and cure. Without the proper addressing of funding, we risk the possibility of losing programs and services. This at a time when we are facing new challenges and mental health needs that must be addressed if we are to successfully confront the dangers that we, as a society, face if mental health is not being regarded as equally important as physical health and wellness.

Any society, any nation, is judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members; the last, the least, the littlest.

Thank you, and please find the will to help those who otherwise are being left behind. Help Gilead realize its mission to "... provide a broad range of high quality health care and recovery support services in the home and community to improve mental health, physical well being, independence, and community integration for the individuals we serve."